Netsuke on the Neva: Japanese Influence on Russian Sculpture from the House of Fabergé and the Myth of the Decorative Arts

Nikita Sveshnikov

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Janice Leoshko, Ph.D.
Department of Art and Art History
Supervising Professor

Contents

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Rich Diamond and Pearl and Gold
in evry Place was seen;
Rare splendors, Yellow, Blew, Red, White and Green,
Mine Eys did evry where behold.

Thomas Traherne

List of Figures

Introduction

Peter Carl Fabergé, to many, is synonymous with Russia. While the scope and subject matter of his work varies greatly, it goes without saying that Fabergé's work captures the spirit of Russia.[1] Perhaps this is due to his close association with the imperial family, who provided him with ways of representing the empire with objects, or perhaps due to his understanding of Russian taste. Often, when one mentions Fabergé to a stranger or friend, that person responds with something along the lines of "oh, like the Russian eggs?" Fabergé's most famous works are his series of bejeweled Imperial Easter Eggs, which the Tsar commissioned as gifts for the Tsarina and others. The eggs have grown in popularity over time to become representative of the last of the Romanovs. Many who know nothing of Fabergé or his work still equate his name with Russia and the last of the emperors. For Russians and for foreigners, there is something that twinkles just beyond the reach of words that one finds in many of the pieces by Fabergé. Perhaps this is why he has captured the attention of so many collectors for the last one-hundred-and-thirty-odd years. Many have tried to describe the magic of a Fabergé piece; many have failed. Fabergé's London branch manager, H.C. Bainbridge, has come the closest. Perhaps it is the living knowledge of thousands of years of fine gold craftsmanship that Fabergé kept alive in his works, drawing on goldsmith practices from his studies in western Europe. Perhaps it is the rich symbolism that one finds in many of the pieces: symbols of Russian history that made the country what it became. It is difficult to put it into words, but some things are better left unsaid and are better experienced by standing in front of an object and letting it speak through its visual

[1] Vladimir Putin and various Oligarchs have been known to purchase Imperial Eggs as symbols of status and Russia.

qualities, conjuring feelings one cannot get from language. What is safe to say, however, is that Fabergé captured something that will never again be captured in our lifetimes. He was born out of a tradition of craftsmanship and artistry that has been all but lost with the advent of machinery and mass-production. Perhaps in the future that skill, that magic, will be discovered again through practice and development, but for now it is trapped forever in the brilliant objects that dance before one's eyes in the stillness of their glass museum-cases and dark treasure-rooms of the world's last remaining monarchs.

Although certain Russian artists have been highlighted in the construction of the history of modern art, Russian art itself occupies a relatively small place in western art historical narratives concerning the 19th and 20th centuries. Not all Russian art was patronized at the imperial level, but some of the works that have been most focused on by the rest of the world were created for the Tsars, specifically works by Peter Carl Fabergé and his House. The principal aim of this thesis is to explore the ways in which certain objects of Russian art—namely, Faberge's small animal sculptures—have been studied, and their place in categories within that study. An aspect of this thesis is to explore why particular works by the House of Fabergé came to be highlighted within art history and not others, and how they have since grown to become works through which Russia is often identified to the rest of the world.

Fabergé (1846-1920) studied in Europe before returning to Russia to take over his father's jewelry company. Within a matter of years, he grew his father's small shop into an international firm that supplied the finest objects to the most powerful people in the world. Much of Fabergé's work is centered around creating useful objects such as cigarette cases, picture frames, and other items of exquisite and beautiful nature. While being well-known for these items but most famous for his Imperial Eggs, there was yet another side to his work that revolved

around carving small animal sculptures and plants, both from object-studies and from nature. Although exquisitely beautiful and highly collected, most notably by The Queen of England, there is far less scholarship on these small sculptures than on the rest of Fabergé's work. Furthermore, his small sculptures drew significant influence from the carving traditions of Japanese *netsuke* which fact, although noted by scholars, has been mostly overshadowed by scholarship of his other work. These animal sculptures are the primary focus of this thesis, both for their significant connection to *netsuke* as well as for the questions they raise about how their place in private collections and museums has been constructed over time through the category of decorative art.

The distinction between the fine arts and the decorative arts has not always existed. Rather, it developed over time beginning in the seventeenth century in Europe with the rise of the first art exhibitions.[2] In France, the visual arts, which had long been separate from the liberal arts, began to be grouped with them in works such as Diderot and d'Alembert's *L'Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers,*[3] in which the visual merges with the liberal, and craft becomes a separate category. At the same time, the idea of *les beaux-arts*[4] began to develop, and thinkers began to classify the arts in works such as Charles Batteaux's *Les Beaux Arts réduits à un même principe,* the 1746 tome that classifies the arts as either useful, beautiful, or a combination of both.[5] While these distinctions of category have grown and

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[2] Steven Blake Shubert, "The Decorative Arts: A Problem in Classification," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 12, no. 2 (1993): 77–81.
[3] Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d' Alembert, *L'Encyclopédie Ou Dictionnaire Raisonné Des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (France: Redon, 1751).
[4] The *beaux-arts* are inextricably connected to aesthetics and the beautiful, which has somewhat been lost with the English term of fine arts. Several other European languages, however preserve this connection with the beautiful: German (*schōne Kūnste*) and Italian (*belle arts*).
[5] Steven Blake Shubert, "The Decorative Arts: A Problem in Classification," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 12, no. 2 (1993): 77–81.

developed since they first emerged, providing museums and collectors with ways of constructing narratives, they also change the way one looks at certain objects. Until the rise of these museums, art was elitist, and the average person did not have access to the same objects that the more privileged in society did. The publicness of museums, as discussed by Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach in their early work in the field of museum studies, led to the need for further categorization of objects.[6] In the private home, art is typically unlabeled, and organization is left to the taste of the owner, but when it became more public, categories became necessary.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Russia was marked by intense political unrest leading up to the revolution of 1917. The movements born out of this by the avant-garde artists of the time were instrumental in setting the course for much of twentieth-century Russian art. Wealthy Russian patrons who collected this work also collected much outside of the modernist frame: from Orthodox icons to opulent objects of Fabergé. While this thesis does not delve into the collecting practices of the time, it is a subject which could be explored at great length.

The first movements towards modernism began at the end of the eighteenth century, when greater patronage helped to develop museums and public galleries, providing a space for art to gain independence from the church and court.[7] In addition to producing religious works, artists were heavily reliant on elite patrons whose taste often favored academic values, meaning the avant-garde artist had no space to inhabit without being subject to the control of the court. As public art spaces appeared, the avant-garde was gradually accepted within some circles and thus found greater support, with the culmination being perhaps most apparent in Malevich's *Black*

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[6] Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 2, no. 4 (December 1980): 448-469.

[7] Ekaterina Dyogot, "Russian Art in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century," *University of Nevada, Las Vegas*, (2012): 1-34.

Square in 1915,[8] when art, as Hegel put it, began to "reflect itself."[9] However, it is important to remember that avant-garde artworks were not the only types of art that garnered international attention in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

What are now termed the 'decorative arts' by museums and collectors worldwide, from Fabergé's snuff boxes to his miniature animal sculptures, Tiffany lamps and Lalique glass, were all patronized at the highest level by international collectors, who often collected avant-garde works as well. And yet these items are grouped into a different category from the sculptures of the time: avant-garde or not. Although more spaces existed for artists to gain these audiences than ever before, in Russia, for artists like Fabergé, Imperial patronage meant success at the highest level, as the royalty set many of the trends.[10] This thesis will examine questions of craft, fine art and decoration in certain objects of imperial patronage, as well as what standard art historical treatments have done to emphasize the identity of the empire through those works: solidifying them in their places within museum collections today.

It is apparent that throughout history, the value of an object was often derived from the materials used; Fabergé was revolutionary in his own way by shifting the value from material to "the craftsmanship devoted to a given object."[11] While material was important to him and his

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[8] Exhibited at one of the first avant-garde art museums in the world.
[9] George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010).
[10] An interesting anecdote regarding royal trend-setting may be found on page 207 of H.C. Bainbridge's *Twice Seven,* in which he recounts King Edward's encounter with one of Fabergé's Hippopotami in Nephrite. The King purchased the Hippo, which doubled as a cigar-lighter with the thought of amusing his guests. In the weeks following, Fabergé's London shop was flooded with orders for Nephrite Hippopotami from various Edwardian admirers.
[11] *Fabergé, 1846-1920: Goldsmith to the Imperial Court of Russia, an International Loan Exhibition Assembled on the Occasion of the Queen's Silver Jubilee and Including Objects from the Royal Collection at Sandringham*. Debrett's Peerage Ltd. in Association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1977.

patrons, the craftsmanship that transformed those precious stones into Fabergé's magical objects was something that for that brief moment in history existed and died along with Fabergé. All that is left is for one to try to understand the nature of his objects and how a small, unassuming figurine of a sparrow[12] is so much more than the stone it was carved from and so much more than the sparrow one sees before one's eyes.[13]

[12] Fig. 2
[13] Robert S. Nelson, "The Discourse of Icons, Then and Now," *EBSCO Publishing,* (2002). (For further reading regarding the life beyond the object one sees in front of oneself.)

Fabergé: From Picardy to Petersburg

Few artists are as synonymous with the country in which they create as Fabergé is with Russia. Through time, through art movements, and through political changes, the House of Fabergé has remained an unmistakable symbol of Russian craftsmanship, artistry, and opulence. And yet Fabergé's inherent Russian-ness cannot be fully understood without the knowledge of how the Fabergé family ended up in Russia to begin with. Although information on the family history is scant, there is enough recorded material to understand how a very old French family from Picardy came to find themselves in the St. Petersburg of the Tsars.[14]

It all began, as things of historical nature do, when they are first recorded. In 1685 in Northern France, at the encouragement of the Roman Catholic Church, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, which removed protection for his Protestant subjects and ushered in a new era of persecution. The Fabergé family, being Huguenots, feared for their lives and changed their name to Favri or Fabri[15] in order to help them escape the terror. They fled their homeland of France and began a long wandering through 1,200 miles of Northern Europe until their first recorded stop in Schwedt-on-Oder near Stettin.[16] Here, another name-change was registered for Fabergé's grandfather, Peter. The newly dubbed Fabrier family continue on their way and eventually found themselves in the Baltic Provinces of Russia, where Peter Fabrier became a subject of the Russian Empire. When things had settled down, the family was able to change their name back to Fabergé, as there was no more threat of persecution. In Pernau, Estonia,

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[14] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Twice Seven* (Boston: Dutton, 1937).
[15] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Peter Carl Fabergé: Goldsmith and Jeweller to the Russian Imperial Court, His Life and Work* (London: Batsford, 1949).
[16] Bainbridge, *Peter Carl Fabergé.*

Carl's father Gustav was born. After meeting Carl's mother, Charlotte Jugstedt, Gustav made his way to St. Petersburg and became an apprentice for the jewelers Spiegel.[17] After learning their trade, Gustav was able to save up enough money to open his own goldsmith's shop in 1842 in his basement apartment on *Morskaya Bolshaya* Street. This legendary street, which later went on to grace the tongues of the monarchs of the world, was the beginning and the end of the House of Fabergé.[18] Four years after Gustav opened the basement shop, on May 30th, 1846 Peter Carl Fabergé entered the world.

Business as usual continued in Gustav Fabergé's shop, and nothing he created in those years appears to be extraordinarily remarkable. Scholars tend not to write about Fabergé's father as he does not have a reputation for being particularly cutting-edge in his goldsmith and jewelry design. Finally, in 1860, Gustav and his family retired to Dresden, leaving his shop in the hands of his manager, Zaiontchkovsky.[19] Carl Fabergé, who is the primary concern of this exploration, was educated in both Dresden and Paris, where he is believed to have apprenticed with a goldsmith, although little is known of the details.[20] It is in Paris that he must have been exposed to a vast number of objects and people that would later influence much of his work. Having access to Parisian museum and gallery collections would have influenced his later work derived from the great French trends of the time. After working for several years with Zaiontchkovsky, Carl was able to take over the House at the age of twenty-four in 1870. The basement was eventually upgraded to the ground-floor of the building across the street, which doubled in size

[17] Bainbridge, *Peter Carl Fabergé.*
[18] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Twice Seven* (Boston: Dutton, 1937).
[19] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Peter Carl Fabergé: Goldsmith and Jeweller to the Russian Imperial Court, His Life and Work* (London: Batsford, 1949).
[20] Bainbridge, *Peter Carl Fabergé.*

as it continued to grow in 1890. In 1898, the entirety of No. 24 Morskaya was purchased to house the powerful and ever-growing House of Fabergé.

While unusual for the time, Fabergé's vision of the House propelled it into unbelievable success. Although he had around 700 craftsmen working for him at the time of peak operation,[21] their accomplishments were due in part to the close-proximity of the workers, with the finishing studios being under the same roof as the construction studios which allowed for much closer supervision and discussion of necessary changes. In addition, the building housed an extensive reference library covering all topics of the art of goldsmithing and working with precious materials.[22] Here in the reference library Fabergé must have spent countless hours drawing inspiration from his collection of over 500 Japanese *netsuke,* the most prized of which he housed separately in a cabinet in his apartment above.[23]

To begin to understand the studio, one must first understand that "the House of Fabergé devoted its energies towards the design, production and sale of attractive toys for the rich."[24] Initially, what made Fabergé stand out from the other jewelers of his time was his dedication to the pure craftsmanship of the objects he produced. It was his belief when he took over his father's jewelry business that value should not come from the rarity of the precious stones and materials used, but from the pure skill of creating an object like no other.[25] Although it was the fashion to flaunt large stones set in fairly-non-complex settings, Fabergé changed the way Russia and the world viewed the sorts of objects he created. Gone were the days when the marvel was in

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[21] Bainbridge, *Peter Carl Fabergé.*
[22] Bainbridge, *Peter Carl Fabergé.*
[23] Fig. 1
[24] Peter Carl Fabergé, et al., *Fabergé: Imperial Jeweller*. (The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg and Fabergé Arts Foundation, Washington D.C. in Association with Thames and Hudson, 1993).
[25] Fabergé, *Fabergé.*

the stones alone. Fabergé understood that his clientele had a fascination with western Europe, specifically France, so he went to great lengths to adopt the fashions of Paris at the time and interpret them for a Russian audience. Fabergé's objects were magical not merely in their materials, but in the sheer complexity of their craftsmanship, and although they often displayed large stones, these were beautifully incorporated into complex forms.

Franz Birbaum, Fabergé's later head work-master, described much of the studio's early work as "somewhat clumsy" and although fashionable for the time, nothing extraordinarily revolutionary.[26] Fabergé's early work did not have a distinct style of its own, but was thought to have been heavily inspired by mainstream French jewelry of the time which was part of Russia's obsession with the west.[27] Additionally, he would have begun by copying what he learned from his father and the jewelers Spiegel. Imperial contracts were highly sought after, with many prominent jewelers vying for a place in the imperial court. Fabergé's imperial sales did not account for very much of his profit in the early years, yet his reputation grew as he began to work as an appraiser for the Hermitage and spent many hours repairing items in the imperial collection, free of charge.[28]

From 1882-1895, Fabergé's brother Agathon came to work for him in St. Petersburg, and this was one of the greatest and most creative periods of Fabergé's studio. Franz Birbaum writes that during this time, many of the iconic objects Fabergé went on to produce for the rest of his career were introduced, from Imperial Eggs to flowers to the small animal figurines. The

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[26] Franz Birbaum, "Memoirs," in *St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, Fabergé: Imperial Jeweller*, (St. Petersburg: The State Hermitage Museum, 1993).
[27] Peter Carl Fabergé, et al., *Fabergé: Imperial Jeweller*. (The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg and Fabergé Arts Foundation, Washington D.C. in Association with Thames and Hudson, 1993).
[28] Fabergé, *Fabergé.*

Hermitage collection became a research center of sorts for the brothers, who spent a good deal of time with the jewelry collections to learn how to improve their own work.

Although what may be dubbed as the Agathon period was a new and flourishing time creatively for the studio, Fabergé began to move far ahead of his competitors by the 1890's with the sale of a diamond necklace to Tsarevich Nikolai, who gave it to Princess Alix of Hessen-Darmstadt in 1894 as a betrothal gift.[29] Subsequently, the House of Fabergé was commissioned for several other large imperial works. After Agathon's death in 1895, Swiss jeweler Franz Birbaum joined Fabergé as his chief designer, and claims to have designed almost all of the imperial eggs created after 1900.[30] Fabergé's business was becoming so successful that he began to establish individual workshops in various locations, allowing them to work on specific aspects of commissions at the same time before bringing them all together into a finished piece on Morskaya Street.

Fabergé opened a shop in London in addition to his St. Petersburg location on Morskaya Street, with the London shop selling over 10,000 objects from 1907-1917.[31] Although the shop was open to the public, the former branch manager H.C. Bainbridge noted that the London shop was little more than a private showroom for the British monarchs and their friends, as most people could not think to afford such luxuries.[32] Not only was Fabergé becoming known in Europe; he gained worldwide recognition, with wealthy aristocrats travelling to St. Petersburg to

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[29] Franz Birbaum, "Memoirs," in *St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, Fabergé: Imperial Jeweller*, (St. Petersburg: The State Hermitage Museum, 1993).
[30] Peter Carl Fabergé, et al., *Fabergé: Imperial Jeweller*. (The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg and Fabergé Arts Foundation, Washington D.C. in Association with Thames and Hudson, 1993).
[31] Fabergé, *Fabergé.*
[32] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Twice Seven* (Boston: Dutton, 1937).

buy his works. Over 150,000 objects were sold worldwide during his career.[33] Fabergé was especially busy surrounding the period of the Tercentenary celebration of the Romanov rule. After that celebration of such apparent success, the House was faced with drastic changes shortly after. Nineteen-seventeen was a year that began decades of upheaval for Russia, with the revolution, the abdication of the throne, and the political unrest that followed. Fabergé's House was put in charge of a "Committee of the Employees of the K. Fabergé Company," and remained in operation until 1918. That year, Fabergé shut down his House, donating it all to the Director of the Hermitage[34], and fled from Russia to Switzerland, where he died of a broken heart two years later in 1920.

Fabergé's son, Agathon, followed a bit of a hapless path in those revolutionary times. Although information on his whereabouts is scarce, according to original documents from The People's Commissariat of Finances, he was employed either by choice or by force (it is not entirely clear) as an expert in precious stones as a member of a Special Committee in charge of identifying and cataloging vast quantities of art objects stolen by the Soviet government from the aristocracy in the name of the people.[35] Agathon was known by his father's London branch

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[33] Franz Birbaum, "Memoirs," in *St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, Fabergé: Imperial Jeweller*, (St. Petersburg: The State Hermitage Museum, 1993).

[34] Although efforts have been made by the author to unearth the whereabouts of Fabergé's large *netsuke* collection, any inquiries into the matter have turned up fruitless. One potential explanation is the donation of Fabergé's estate to The Hermitage, which also houses a large collection of *netsuke.* Requests have been made but to no avail. Perhaps the lack of documents is a result of the political unrest at the time, when things would have been shuffling around as many private collections were seized by the State. The author finds it highly probable that many of the *netsuke* in The Hermitage collection formerly belonged to Fabergé, however the evidence is yet to be found.

[35] Alexandr Evgenevich Fersman, *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones 1st ed., vol. 1* (St. Petersburg: The People's Commissariat of Finances, 1925).

manager, H.C. Bainbridge to be an avid and incredible collector of art and precious objects. Bainbridge describes many a Sunday spent at Agathon's remote forest *dacha* in his autobiography, *Twice Seven.* According to Bainbridge, Agathon's *dacha* was overflowing with priceless treasures he had collected over the years: a collection to rival any prince or archduke of the time. Agathon saw these splendors as an investment in the future of his family, and thus hid them far from the new government's eyes.[36]

In the two-hundred-and-thirty-four-page document, there are 13 references to a so-called "A.K. Faberger." While this misspelling is consistent, with no reference to "Fabergé," it may be an error on the part of the translator who is unknown. While this may seem odd, it is clear from Bainbridge's *Twice Seven* that his encounters with Agathon are consistent with the claims in this document from The People's Commissariat of Finances. Additionally, while Peter Carl Fabergé's name is often translated with a "C" instead of a "K," the Russian (Карл) would without a doubt leave an early translator with A.K as in "Agathon Karl."

[36] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Twice Seven* (Boston: Dutton, 1937).

Fabergé, Art History, and the Decorative Arts

The field of Art History is still often weighed down by concerns of classification and ranking.[37] As much as the field is changing to become more open-minded toward the treatment of art and art objects from around the world, it is unlikely, for example, that one would find in academic texts a reference to one of Fabergé's works as fine art sculpture. Why is this? Artists throughout history have made small metal or stone sculptures in much the same manner as Fabergé. They have not always made every aspect of their work by themselves. Artists of every kind, much like Fabergé have for years employed vast teams of assistants, who assemble their artistic visions using directions from the author. Why is it, then, that Fabergé is still considered almost entirely as a jeweler, a craftsman, or a metalworker? Why is the designation of artist and sculptor almost completely lacking from scholarly writings on his work? While it is true that many of the better-known objects Fabergé created served some useful purpose such as holding cigarettes, telling the time, or providing a place for one's hand to rest atop a fancy walking stick, Fabergé also created many small animals, plants, and figures during his period of operation which are still designated as trinkets, decorative art, or applied art and are hardly ever referred to as sculpture of artistic value.

To begin to understand why Fabergé's work would be categorized within the decorative arts or applied arts sections of museums, it is important to first understand why the category of decorative arts exists in the first place. It is useful to begin with several definitions of what is meant by the term decorative arts*:*

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[37] Robert S. Nelson, "The Map of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 1 (1997): 28–40.

"Three-dimensional utilitarian objects with aesthetic merit."

Christine Minter-Dowd, *Finders' Guide to Decorative Arts in the Smithsonian Institution,* 1981.

"Term embracing applied art and also objects that are made purely for decoration."

Oxford Dictionary of Art, 1997.

"Art that is used to decorate or embellish an object that has a practical purpose, as opposed to fine art, which exists as an end in itself."

Michael and Deborah Clarke, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms,* 2010.

Applied art is the ornamental quality which men choose to add to articles of utility

William Morris, *The Arts and Crafts of Today*, 1889.

The decorative arts have not always had the same meaning through history. The word "art"[38] originates from the Latin *ars,* translated often as skill, craft, or knowledge.[39] Neither in ancient Greece nor in the Middle Ages were the visual arts considered to be a part of the arts espoused by the muses, nor the liberal arts which included grammar, rhetoric, logic, geometry,

[38] The Oxford English Dictionary defines:
"Art: Skill; its display, application, or expression" and "Craft: To make or construct skillfully."
"Art originally shared many of its meanings with *craft* (see CRAFT n. II.); however, by the 17th cent. the association of *art* with creative or imaginative skill (see sense 7) rather than technical ability tended to result in less semantic overlap between the two words. Especially in sense 3a *art* is often contrasted with *science* (see note at SCIENCE n. 4a), with *art* now frequently understood (again perhaps reinforced by sense 7) as an ability to adopt a creative or flexible approach, in contrast to the application of more theoretical or scientific principles. From the Middle Ages *art* has often been contrasted with *nature* (see sense 12). Compare also the historical sense development of TECHNIC adj., TECHNICAL adj., TECHNOLOGY n."
[39] Linda Seckelson, "Decorative Arts: Laying the Groundwork," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 1-4.

arithmetic, music and astronomy.[40] Separated from the liberal arts were the so-called "mechanical arts,"[41] which included everything from weaving and wood-carving to painting and sculpture. It was not until the Italian Renaissance that scholars changed the way the arts were conceived of, elevating painting and sculpture to the high categories that music and poetry were privy to.

The meaning of art changes over time. In the past, people did not think of art as existing for its own sake, but ascribed a function to it. While not all function was literal, it was still attached to the object. To use the example of the Italian Renaissance once again, much of what has been emphasized in Art History has been the religious art of the time. While it was indeed beautiful, its function was either as a devotional object in a sacred space or as a teaching technology for ideas concerning morality.[42] Today, while many examples of such painting still exist within their original context, serving their intended function, many such paintings exist in museum collections as well and are quite often displayed as fine art. The separation of the fine arts from the decorative continued into the 18th century, when the rise of machine manufacturing prompted great thinkers like Kant, Diderot and Goethe to grapple with the questions of decorative arts, ultimately leading to the current understanding that the concept is based on "function or utility, materials and production, and decoration."[43] [44]

It was in the 19th century, with the rise of industrialization and the mass production of objects that questions about the meaning of art were concentrated and sometimes separated from

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[40] Seckelson, "Decorative Arts," 1.
[41] Seckelson, "Decorative Arts," 2.
[42] Seckelson, "Decorative Arts," 2.
[43] Seckelson, "Decorative Arts," 2.
[44] Denis Diderot, et al., *The Theory of Decorative Art: An Anthology of European and American Writings, 1750-1940,* ed. Isabelle Frank (Annandale-On-Hudson: Bard, 2000): 1-408.

the utility that had previously defined all made things since ancient times. William Morris, the founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, "vehemently opposed the mechanization of art-making."[45] He believed that using beautiful objects in everyday life would elevate the experience of people, and believed that everyday things could be embellished with beautiful designs. Morris and many others believed in the importance of invoking past practices: reconnecting with what was lost due to the rise of mechanical reproduction that swept across the world. This is the idea which is the basis of his definition for the applied arts.

If one thinks for a moment about these definitions of the decorative arts, it becomes a bit difficult to know where to place Fabergé within the category. It is true that Fabergé produced three-dimensional objects that did indeed have aesthetic merit, but were they utilitarian? A Fabergé cigarette case, for example, falls into the Minter-Dowd definition, but a Fabergé egg or animal sculpture does not. Would it not fall into the fine art definition of art that is an end in itself? Does the object's utility come in its ability to portray a mood or feeling, or in the egg's ability to house a family photograph,[46] or in the small sculpture's ability to depict an accurate portrait of The Queen's pet? If this were the case, why would they not fall into the same museum categories as fine art?[47] Why would the sculptures on Michelangelo's *Tomb of Guiliano d'Medici* be considered fine art sculptures? Were they not made merely to decorate and embellish an otherwise quite-boring tomb? The materiality as well is comparable. Fabergé used

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[45] Linda Seckelson, "Decorative Arts: Laying the Groundwork," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 1-4.

[46] *Imperial Napoleonic Egg*, Metmuseum.org. www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/238803.

[47] *Предметы прикладного искусства* (Russian category of "applied" or "decorative arts." Literally translated to "objects of [applied] art." Used in the State Hermitage Museum categorization of Fabergé Objects.)

precious stones from Russia, and Michelangelo used expensive marble from Italy. How do these sculptures differ? Definitely in size and in time periods, but otherwise they are quite similar in their intent.

The problem with the term decorative art is that it simply creates yet another hierarchy within the world of creation and collecting. Carolyn Dean, a professor of cultural histories in the native Americas and colonial Latin America at the University of California, Santa Cruz, writes in her article *The Trouble with the Term Art* about the issues around imposing western concepts of classification and ranking on global cultures, but her arguments can apply even to objects within the scope of European creation.[48] It is probable that by placing Fabergé's animal sculptures into the categories of decorative art and craftsmanship, the categorizers are doing him a disservice. Yes, he made jewelry to be worn and objects to be used, but there is nothing inherently useful or utilitarian about his animal sculptures; thus, categorizing them into the decorative or applied arts takes something away from them. Perhaps it could be argued that they were created to sit on desktops or shelves, to embellish the mantelpieces of royal estates. How then, do they differ from another piece of fine art? What painting does not decorate the walls of said estate, what sculpture does not embellish the garden or foyer of the collector? Undoubtedly, the classification of Fabergé's sculpture as decorative would place emphasis on the craftsmanship and skill with which the stone was carved, but it differs little from the level of craftsmanship or skill with which a nineteenth century portrait was painted.

When thinking about the ways scholars and collectors have classified Fabergé's sculptural works, the way this imposes new meaning onto the Japanese *netsuke* from which

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[48] Carolyn Dean, "The Trouble with (The Term) Art," *Art Journal* 65, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 24–32.

Fabergé was inspired and made copies is worth examining. Although the debate on whether or not Russia may be categorized as "The West" could be explored at great length, it undoubtedly falls into the same methods of classification and ranking that western Europe does, and therefore imposes meaning on the art from which its own art derives. In the case of *netsuke* it may be argued that they fit the definition of decorative arts quite literally: a useful object that is embellished for visual pleasure. However, Fabergé's sculptures served no real purpose other than existing, and *res ipsa loquitur.* When an object exists simply as an end in itself, it falls under the Oxford definition of fine art. In this way, it may be inferred that Fabergé's sculpture has been ranked as decorative either because of material, size, collectability, or as a reaction to what art was becoming: something with no use.

When looking at material, it is no secret that materiality dictates a great deal about an object. For some objects, the power is in the material, such as the famous Emerald Buddha from the Royal Palace in Bangkok. Wars were fought over the Emerald Buddha, and yet there are many similarly-sized Buddha sculptures of less striking material. For others, the materiality of an object (including in the case of Fabergé) dictates either its worth or rarity. For example, Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God* was a platinum skull cast covered in 8,601 diamonds.[49] While the object is relatively small, the asking price was $50 million, placing the value partly in the material used to create the sculpture. While it is true that much of the value lies in Hirst's name, when compared to a work by Fabergé, it can seem strange that *For the Love of God* is considered a work of modern art, whereas an egg of similar size and similarly encrusted with diamonds is

[49] Damien Hirst, "For the Love of God," *For the Love of God - Damien Hirst*. Accessed 6 March 2020. www.damienhirst.com/for-the-love-of-god.

considered a work of decorative art, and somehow lower in the hierarchy of relevance in the art historical canon.

Because of the issues with material, size, and perceived intent, finding much in-depth writing describing Faberge's work as art is difficult. The catalogues are vast. The exhibitions are plenty. The writing is dense, historical, and tends to analyze his work as trinkets, as works of immense craftsmanship, but almost never as sculpture that makes the viewer *feel.* It would be preposterous to claim that Fabergé's creations, no matter how small, do not make the viewer *feel* something. Why do collectors collect? Some for investment, but most for pleasure, with the investment coming as a happy side-effect.[50] Just as an object classified as fine art by the seller will strike a feeling within the collector, so do Fabergé's small animal sculptures. They may be different feelings, perhaps feelings that one would not normally associate with fine art, but they are feelings nonetheless. Fabergé's close friend and manager of the London showroom, H.C. Bainbridge, is one of the few who saw past the label of jeweler and craftsman and into the mind of Fabergé himself. Bainbridge, unlike the others who write about Fabergé, saw his work as an expressive medium that shifted beyond the realm of the desires of patrons:

> I am on delicate ground, I know, the ground of what is commonly called "applied art." The idea seems to be that when a man makes something with his own hands, something which is beautiful to look at and serves no other purpose, then it is art and he is an Artist; but when he employs others and directs them to carry out his designs for things which serve some useful purpose, then it is "applied art" and he is not an artist, but simply an employer of labour. It is a distinction which has always puzzled me.
> Anyhow, I put it on record, Fabergé was an Artist. If you had asked him, he would have told you that it was the very essence of his art that an object should serve some useful purpose, as well as be beautiful to look at.[51]

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[50] Paula Findlen and Paolo Trabucchi, "Ereditare un Museo: Collezionismo, Strategie Famillari e Pratiche Culturali Nell'Italia del XVI Secolo," *Quaderni Storici* 39, no. 115 (2004): 45–81.
[51] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Twice Seven* (Boston: Dutton, 1937): 166.

Bainbridge's now-obscure autobiography, *Twice Seven,*[52] is an invaluable record of the world and mind of Fabergé not only as an employer, but a dear friend as well. "Quand on voit la chose on la croît," wrote Bainbridge. And indeed, he believed Fabergé was a true artist, for he saw it with his own eyes. To know where to place Fabergé's objects is difficult, as the scope of his work spans many categories. It is clear, however, that he was an artist of his time, and to place his work within a decorative category regardless of what form it takes is a mistake.

[52] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Twice Seven* (Boston: Dutton, 1937).

Netsuke and the 19th Century Obsession

To begin to understand the tradition out of which Fabergé's small animal sculptures emerge, it is important to understand the origins of *netsuke* and their use in Japan. While small sculptures have existed since prehistoric times around the world, including in Russia, this essay is concerned primarily with the Japanese influence on Fabergé's work both in style and carving method. During the Edo period, which spanned from 1615 to 1867, a new type of art in the form of *netsuke* evolved to fulfill a specific need as an integral part of traditional Japanese clothing.[53] An important aspect of *netsuke* is that they are a useful object. This is one of the key differences between Fabergé's *netsuke*-inspired objects and the ones found in Japan. The purpose of *netsuke* is to suspend other objects, known as *sagemono* or 'hanging things' from the traditional sash or *obi*.[54] [55] This is accomplished by the cord openings on the *netsuke* called *himotoshi,* through which the cord connecting the *sagemono* to the *obi* is passed and knotted.[56] In Fabergé's case, his sculptures served no practical purpose other than existing for themselves, which oddly enough classifies them outside of the realm of the decorative arts while placing *netsuke* into that realm.

A very important aspect dictating the appeal of *netsuke* is their 'smooth, agreeable feel,'[57] or *aji.* The *aji* of a *netsuke* is the means by which the artist communicates his or her spirit through the *netsuke,* not simply with sight but with touch as well. The importance of touch in the

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[53] Barbra Teri Okada, "Netsuke: The Small Sculptures of Japan," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 38, no. 2 (1980): 3–48.
[54] Okada, "Netsuke," 3.
[55] Raymond Bushell, "Concerning the Walters Collection of Netsuke," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 35 (1977): 77–85.
[56] Barbra Teri Okada, "Netsuke: The Small Sculptures of Japan," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 38, no. 2 (1980): 3–48.
[57] Okada, "Netsuke," 4.

life of a *netsuke* places it in an altogether different category than conventional western sculpture. Western ideas of sculpture are more decorative, and typically a sculpture is not meant to be touched, but merely looked at from either a specific vantage point or from all sides. While the most common *netsuke* of the *katabori* style accomplish both of these criteria, being both carved on all sides yet able to stand upright unsupported;[58] they are, by the nature of touch, a different kind of sculpture. While Fabergé may not have had the concept of *aji* in mind when carving his small animals, their influence from the *netsuke* tradition makes aspects of *aji* present regardless, as is seen in pieces such as the figure of a Toad carved in jasper from the Royal Collection.[59]

Fabergé's sculptures can be narrowed down to a specific category of *netsuke,* which are defined by their forms. While *netsuke* in the *sashi* style are typically long, narrow, and made of wood, the *manjū* style is characterized by a rounder, flatter shape.[60] While these styles would have been quite present in Fabergé's exposure to Japan, his influence seems to come primarily from the *katabori* style, which is the most common and generally quite compact and carved on all sides. Interestingly, the *katabori netsuke* often had not only the primary function of securing the *sagemono* to the *obi,* but served secondary purposes such as those of ashtrays, compasses, sundials, and even small firefly cages.[61] Fabergé's sculptures served neither a primary nor a secondary purpose other than existing purely for themselves.

Although the *netsuke* are useful objects serving a fashionable purpose, by the early eighteenth century they began to heavily reflect the personalities of the artist as well as the geography in which they were created.[62] For example, the artists in a remote place like Iwami

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[58] Okada, "Netsuke," 4.
[59] Fig. 2
[60] Okada, "Netsuke," 4.
[61] Okada, "Netsuke," 4.
[62] Okada, "Netsuke," 5.

were more focused on depicting naturalistic scenes with the materials their landscape had to offer, whereas the ancient imperial city of Kyoto had a more "dignified and restrained"[63] style with use of more precious materials like ivory. It is worth noting that several of the *netsuke* copies or studies that Fabergé made were of the Japanese artist Masanao, who hailed from the Kyoto school.[64] Perhaps as the imperial jeweler to the Romanovs, the more dignified style of Kyoto appealed to Fabergé, coming across as more elegant and fitting for the royalty of Europe whom he supplied.

The decline of *netsuke* popularity in Japan began in the mid-19th century. In 1853 Commodore Perry sailed into the Bay of Uragin, and in 1867 the Japanese isolation policy ended, forcing the country to open and thus allowing the entry of more western ideas and customs. Fashion began to change, and the introduction of cigarettes made carrying a tobacco pouch unnecessary. As people stopped wearing Kimonos in public, the need for *netsuke* declined rapidly.[65] However, decorative *netsuke* production increased as Westerners from Europe became aware of their existence. While there was less Japanese demand for them, the European art markets had great interest in the little sculptures, causing artists to continue working to supply the new markets. Fabergé would most likely have been exposed to *netsuke* from an early age, perhaps in the museums of Paris where he studied before taking over the House of Fabergé in Russia, where he may have developed an interest in creating objects of *japonisme.* Eventually, he

[63] Okada, "Netsuke," 4.

[64] Tatiana Yahiro (Nikolova), "Fabergé and Netsuke," *International Netsuke Society* (2015).

[65] Yahiro, "Fabergé."

was to aid in the Japanese trade of *netsuke* as well, amassing a collection of over 500 of the sculptures in his apartment on Morskaya street.[66]

[66] Timothy Bryan Adams, "Fabergé's Use of Oriental Motifs" (PhD diss., San Diego State University, 1988): 1-248.

Fabergé and Japan: The Inspired Artist

Some of the most fascinating works by Faberge are his miniature animal objects, which evoke a feeling of wonder and magic that hearkens back to childhood.[67] The main aspect that sets these miniatures apart from the vast majority of Faberge's work is their lack of gemstones, which has caused people to treat them slightly differently from the other objects he was so famous for creating. The animal miniatures are made out of precious materials or semi-precious stone, yet they are not bedazzled like much of his other work. While the eyes will often be made of gemstones, the rest of their bodies are relatively unadorned, relying on the forms rendered from stone for their visual interest.

As mentioned previously, when Japan was forced to open to the western world for trade in 1853, a vast influx of Japanese artworks of all kinds began to trickle into Europe and the United States. Just as the influence of Japanese works like woodblock prints was seen in the work of Western artists like Manet, Van Gogh and Frank Lloyd Wright, the less-studied side of this influence was on the Russian arts and objects of the time. Fabergé, like many of his contemporaries, collected Japanese *netsuke:* small, typically ivory or wooden sculptures of animals and people used "to suspend articles such as pouches or cases from the traditional *obi* or sash around a Kimono."[68] Although more *netsuke* would have probably been seen in places like Paris, down the street from Fabergé's shop in St. Petersburg was a store called Japan[69] where he must have frequently purchased objects that interested him. Fabergé amassed a collection of over

[67] Lisa Taylor, Director *A La Vielle Russie*.
[68] Adams, "Fabergé," 152.
[69] Adams, "Fabergé," 152.

500 Japanese *netsuke,* and housed them in a cabinet in his apartment.[70] Although his collection was quite extensive, it is unknown what happened to his *netsuke,* and there is no definitive answer as to what collection absorbed them or where they went. However, the State Hermitage Museum houses over 1,600 *netsuke,*[71] and it is highly probable that with the events of the revolution in 1918, Fabergé's *netsuke* were absorbed by the Hermitage along with many of his other objects, as he donated the contents of his shop to the Director of the Museum before fleeing the country. The lack of a paper trail is most likely due to the political unrest that was transpiring at the time, with many seizures of private collections and discreet sales to western collectors to fund the new government.[72]

Although Fabergé's animals had been circulating in Europe for some time, Henry Walters was one of the first American collectors to take notice. On a trip to St. Petersburg in the summer of 1900, he discovered the pieces and began bringing them back to the United States. Although the most impressive collection is The Queen's Royal Collection, the Walters family amassed many Fabergé objects, which account for the lovely collection at the Walters Museum in Baltimore, Maryland.

Although scholarship on the connection of Fabergé to *netsuke* is not as prevalent as other writings about his work*,* there are several of his animal sculptures in particular that have been noted to be direct copies of *netsuke,* and therefore it is possible to infer his influences from specific Japanese artists. Fabergé was heavily influenced by the Kyoto and Yamada schools,

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[70] Fig. 1

[71] "Hermitage," Hermitage, last modified April 17, 2020, www.hermitagemuseum.org/.

[72] Robert C Williams, "The Quiet Trade: Russian Art and American Money," *The Wilson Quarterly (1976-)* 3, no. 1 (1979): 162–175.

with his biggest influence believed to be the artist Masanao from the Kyoto school. Several of Fabergé's works appear to be direct copies of Masanao's *netsuke,* with both subject matter and carving style. This is most apparent in several of the sparrow and monkey figures, which appear to be direct copies of Kaigyokusai Masatsugu's *Mystic Ape* now housed in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts collection.[73] The monkey was a popular subject among Japanese *netsuke* carvers, and the unusual forms in Masatsugu's depictions must have fascinated Fabergé.

Fabergé's three sparrows, carved for Queen Alexandra of England, appear to be directly influenced by the Kyoto school.[74] The sparrows are not traditional for the Russian or European style, but are small and round, smoothly carved with small wings, upright chests and wide mouths, a style that did not exist in the west at this time. While much of Fabergé's later sculptural work for Queen Alexandra did not so closely resemble Japanese *netsuke,* the early influences served as a jumping-off point for Fabergé's creativity and eventually helped him develop his own style.

In another example of Fabergé's Japanese influence, one may examine his carved Kingfisher, which is characteristic of the *ittobori* style. This style is distinguished by the angular, single knife stroke carving method, which gives it a unique look—slightly different from the miniature realism of many *netsuke.* While not all *netsuke* follow the *ittobori* style, it is not uncommon, and easily recognizable in some of Fabergé's early work.[75]

Another fascinating and rare *netsuke* is by an artist known as Seiko, who was part of the Minku school in the late 18th century. His *netsuke* shows two small puppies on a straw mat.[76] The

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[73] Timothy Bryan Adams, "Fabergé's Use of Oriental Motifs" (PhD diss., San Diego State University, 1988): 1-248.
[74] Fig. 3
[75] Adams, "Fabergé," 154.
[76] Fig. 4

detail on this *netsuke* is incredible, and is mirrored in Fabergé's *Puppies on a Mat* from the India Early Minshall Collection.[77] Fabergé's puppies are rendered in a different material, being of agate, chalcedony and marble.[78] He never used ivory, but preferred to work with semi-local stones, as Siberia was a good source of many precious minerals at that time.[79]

The example of the monkeys referenced earlier is interesting as well. Monkeys are quite a common subject of *netsuke* carvers, and Fabergé directly copied their poses, changing only the material. The mystic monkeys are found throughout Japan, and a particular example by Kwaigyokusai Masatsugu (1813-1893) is of interest. The Masatsugu monkey curls in on itself, covering its face with its front hands and wrapping its legs up around the back of its head.[80] Fabergé's monkeys, carved from Amazonite and obsidian, are almost direct copies, even keeping with the round shape of Masatsugu.[81] This is one of the most prominent examples of his study of *netsuke,* and makes it clear that he had a wide variety in his collection to work from.

Overall, it is clear that the influence of *netsuke* on the small animal objects produced by Fabergé was paramount in the development of his style. Just as many artists will copy masters in painting in order to build the skills they need to pursue their own work, so did Fabergé copy the great *netsuke* carvers of Japan to gain an understanding of what was possible in the medium of stone, and how he could take the forms of *netsuke* and develop them further into something truly unique for his audience.

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[77] Adams, "Fabergé," 154.
[78] Fig. 5
[79] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Twice Seven* (Boston: Dutton, 1937).
[80] Fig. 6
[81] Fig. 7

Conclusion: Fabergé— "Genius on the Rampage."[82]

With the aforementioned evidence, one is left to ponder a number of things. With the limited personal accounts available, it seems that Carl Fabergé as a person was a bit of a recluse. A humble, brilliant, pensive sort of man. "Man philosophises as he lives," said Bainbridge once, and it is true—for every time we write about Art History, we should be philosophising as well. What is the use of categories like the decorative arts? What is the use of categories like the fine arts? What good does it do any artist to be categorized into one or the other, or even to be thrown from the categories into the peripheries of so-called "outsider art?" Certainly, it does nothing for the artist. It has done well for artists in the past to throw themselves into certain categories. I need not describe R. Mutt's stampede into the fray in detail, but it remains clear that categories as critics, museums, and collectors create them simply exist to the artist to be shattered.

Categories are one way to make sense of the world. After all how would auction houses operate if the collectors had no idea of what they were about to see in auction? To a *netsuke* collector, for example, an auction advertising 19th Century Japanese clothing articles may be of interest, and an auction of Decorative Arts from England may be of no interest. But what really makes sense about the world of art categorization anyways? Is it necessary to say that a small sculpture of a sparrow by Carl Gustavovich Fabergé is a trinket, a piece of decorative art from the early 20th century? What does that do for the sparrow or Carl Gustavovich? Why not simply define the object by what it is: a small sculpture of a sparrow rendered beautifully in nephrite? The nephrite sparrow holds hundreds of years of history within. It comes out of Japanese and Russian artistic styles. It has a story that spans the ages of art historians grappling with the

[82] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Twice Seven* (Boston: Dutton, 1937).

questions of category. Is it fair to place an object with such a powerful history next to a display of Fabergé silverware? What disservice does that do for the sparrow? Silverware is beautiful, and has its own history, but it goes without saying that people will pass by it more quickly than they would a sculpture. Maybe that's the problem too: that one is taught from an early age to rank and classify what is worthwhile to look at. Why not look at it all, and appreciate works for what they are, not what someone else decided they were.

And then there is the question of *netsuke* and *japonisme* in the 19th and 20th centuries. What explains the Western obsession with Japan? Perhaps in part it was the 18th century interest in collecting, which has been around since European countries first started their colonies. Without a doubt, it was also the lure of the exotic, something new and different that most of the west had never seen before. While *japonisme* was a global phenomenon, its influence on the Russian world is less talked about, yet it is there regardless. When a figure with as much influence as Fabergé draws on Japan for his work, it causes others who look to Fabergé for inspiration to be indirectly influenced by Japan.

While Japanese art and objects were collected by artists around the globe, there is no evidence that Fabergé collected woodblock prints or two-dimensional material. His interest in *netsuke* is most definitely due in large part to the mediums in which he worked, but perhaps also due to the enchanting quality of the *netsuke* themselves. Edmund De Waal, a British ceramicist of the Ephrussi family, writes in his memoir about the captivating quality of the *netsuke* he inherited. He tumbles them in his hands, finding satisfaction when he locates the artist's signature. He moves his fingers along the carved, unfurling ropes, or the flowing water from

buckets. "They are always asymmetric," he says, "you cannot understand the whole from a part."[83]

Like the *netsuke,* one cannot understand Carl Fabergé as a whole from just one part. To call him an applied artist, a craftsperson, a jeweler based on certain objects he made is to claim to understand him based on merely a part of his artistry. It is not the complete picture. One must look at Fabergé as a whole. Was he a jeweler? Yes. Was he a craftsman? Absolutely. Was he a conductor of an orchestra of assistants and artists? Without a doubt. How then can one relegate him to merely one category of his life's work? The only word left to call him is perhaps the highest category of artist.

Fabergé's influence on the world of beautiful, collectible objects was beyond the scope of understanding. How a jeweler from Russia could have the tragic Empress Eugénie standing on his doorstep one day and the King of Siam on another has puzzled scholars for ages.[84] Gone were the days when an artist or jeweler had to come to the royal courts of the world to sell their creations. The royals came to Fabergé. They knocked on his doors, they peered in his windows, they clustered in groups in the streets outside his shops. They were obsessed, smitten with the brilliance of his works. They emerged from their castles and became commoners before Carl Gustavovich. They requested audiences with *him,* not the other way around.[85] Fabergé may very well have been the first true celebrity artist on a global scale.

Another instance to help in understanding the artist Fabergé is to look at his royal commission from King Edward and Queen Alexandra of England. Just as a sculptor may be

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[83] Edmund De Waal, *The Hare with the Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance* (London: Picador, 2011), 14-15.
[84] Henry Charles Bainbridge, *Twice Seven* (Boston: Dutton, 1937): 259.
[85] Bainbridge, *Twice Seven,* 250.

commissioned to come to an estate to sculpt a portrait, so Fabergé was commissioned to come to Sandringham to render portraits of the royal animals in precious stone. They wanted him for more than simply his ability to make something that would look good on a desk. They wanted him for his ability to capture the spirit of their favorite animals in the world, and they knew that he as an artist could do it.

Overall, after examining the place of Fabergé within Art History, his influence from Japan and the myth of the decorative arts, one is left to ponder how all sorts of objects are treated both in display and in scholarly work. Moving forward in our era of new methods of display, not merely in galleries and museums but in the virtual world as well, we will need to tackle new issues of treatment, display and categorization. We are in a new time with fresh challenges, and the questions that have been pondered in the past must be pondered again for the future. While an artist like Fabergé may never exist again, his objects live on in new ways, and it is therefore paramount to examine the ways they have been treated, are being treated and will be treated.

Bainbridge walked with Fabergé one night in Petersburg, far from Bolshaiya Morskaiya. They came to a crossroads and Fabergé paused for a moment. "I go to the right and you to the left," he said.[86] What did he mean by that? People spend lifetimes analyzing and re-analyzing artists, their work, what they meant when they created something. Fabergé was right. There is no need to overcomplicate things. Things are what they are. Fabergé goes one way; the historians go another. Let them do as they will, let them categorize and re-categorize the nephrite sparrow endlessly. Somewhere far away in Petersburg, far from Bolshaiya Morskayia, far from the simple sign reading "ФАБЕРЖЕ" above the door of that old stone building, the spirit of Carl Gustavovich has turned right at the crossroads and walks alone along the path, taking breaths of

[86] Bainbridge, *Twice Seven,* 266.

the crisp night air. He pauses for a moment to smile to himself before he continues on his way, his eyes twinkling at the little nephrite sparrow he saw dancing in his head.

Images

Fig. 1: Fabergé's apartment at No. 24 Morskaya Street with a display case housing part of his *netsuke* collection.

Fig. 2: Fabergé, *Toad.* Royal Collection Trust.

Fig. 3: Fabergé, *Sparrow.* Royal Collection Trust.

Fig. 4: Seiko, *Two Puppies on a Straw Cloak.*

Fig. 5: Fabergé, *Puppies on a Mat.*

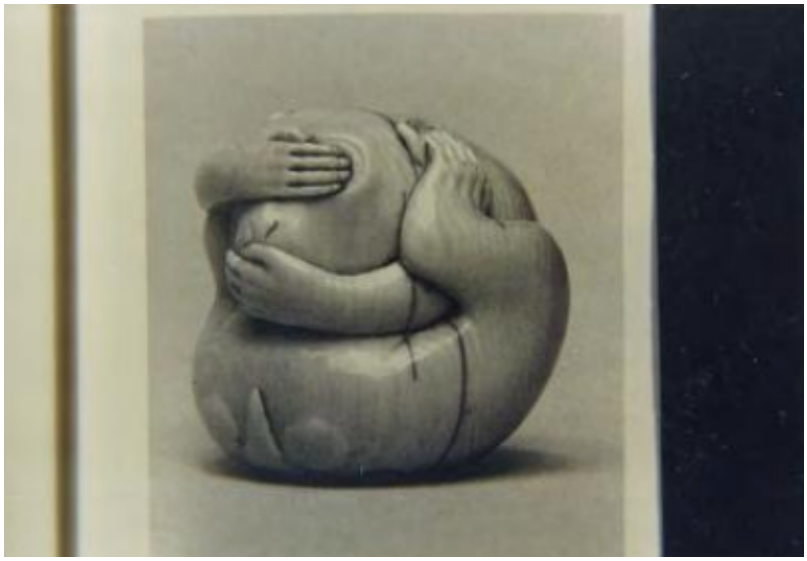

Fig. 6: Masatsugu, *Ivory Monkey.*

Fig. 7: Fabergé Monkeys in Amazonite and Obsidian.

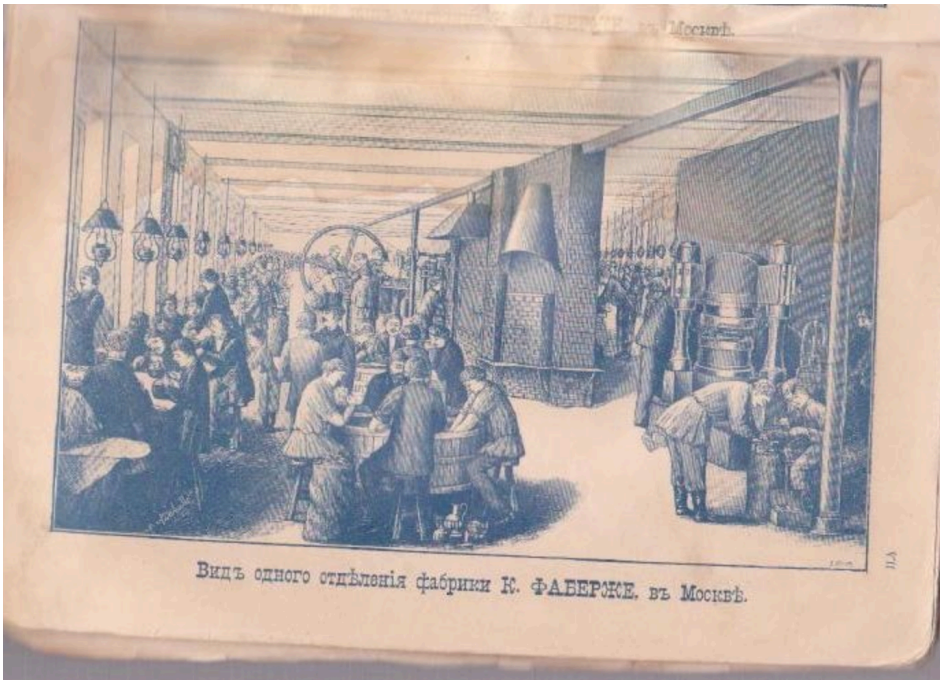

Fig. 8: Rare image of the interior workrooms at the Fabergé Moscow branch from an 1893 Catalogue and Price List, obtained from an anonymous silver collector, April 26, 2020.

Fig. 9: Object display from Fabergé 1893 catalogue. Courtesy of an anonymous silver collector, April 26, 2020.

Fig. 10: Fabergé, *Sparrow.* Property from the Collection of King George I of the Hellenes; Christie's London, 24 January 2007, lot 370.

Fig. 11: Plum Sparrow, *fukura suzume.* Masanao, late 18th C. Kyoto School. *Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

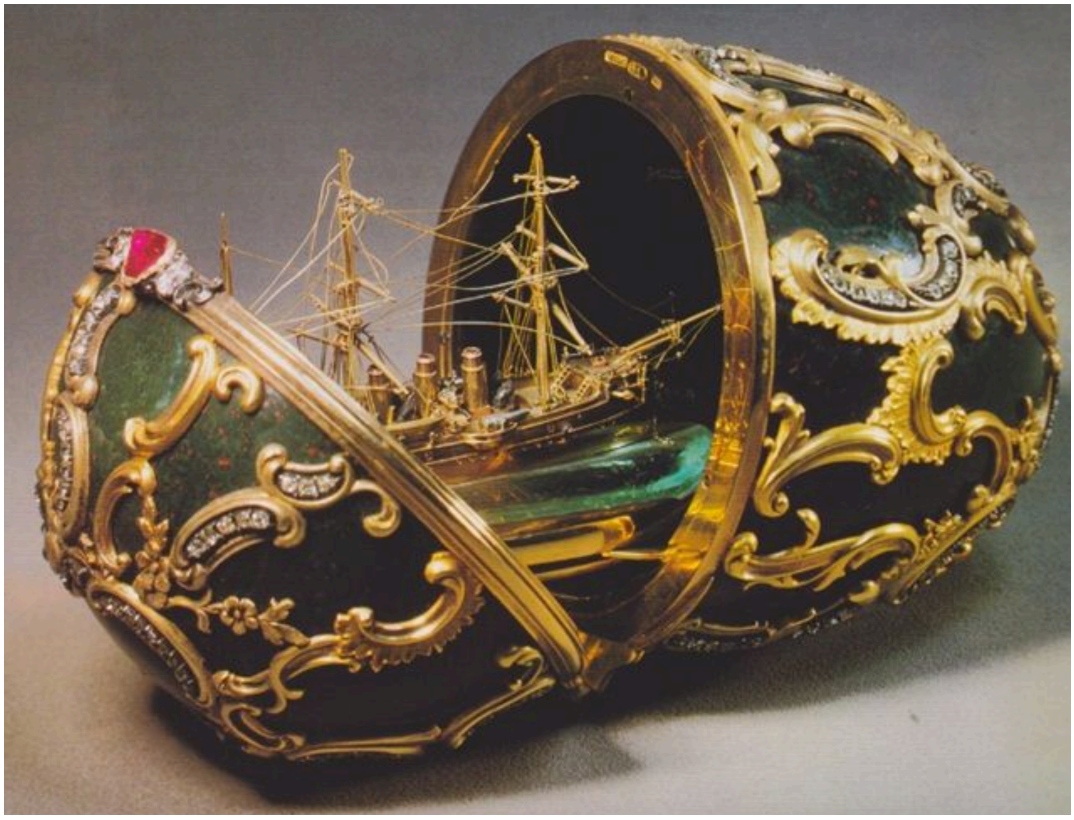

Fig. 12: Fabergé, *Memory of Azov* Imperial Egg, 1891.

Fig. 13: Mitauhieo *Ittobori Duck.*

Fig. 14: Fabergé, *Kingfisher* in *ittobori* style.

Fig. 15: Fabergé Cigarette Case.

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